

The Post-Searchlight

By Randolph Wind
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U.S. Rep. Sanford Bishop officially presented on June 1 the 404 permit issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers that gives the Grady County Commission the authority to construct a 960-acre fishing lake on Tired Creek.

"There is an old proverb that says, 'Do not cast your nets in rivers where there are no fish.' And I know there were times when it seemed that no permit would be issued, and that seeking the permit was like casting our nets in a river without fish. Today, we have proved this wrong—we caught a big fish! And as a result, we'll soon see a 960-acre recreational lake full of fish!" Bishop said.

Rep. Bishop added, "This is a lesson in persistence. We are here today to celebrate the hard work and persistence of many people. Everyone here has contributed something to this project, and I am honored to be among you."

Bishop told the crowd of about 175 gathered on the front lawn of the courthouse that he hoped that for generations to come the Tired Creek lake would be a place of happy memories.

The U.S. congressman closed by saying, "When you teach your children to fish, remember today, remember our persistence and our belief in the Tired Creek project. And teach your children that you can cast your nets where there are seemingly no fish, because if you're persistent, you will reel in a catch."

Rep. Bishop then presented the framed 404 permit to Commission Chairman Al Ball.

Chairman Ball joked, "I don't know if this is a live mike our not but this is a big, big deal."

On a serious note, Ball thanked the congressman for his support in obtaining the 404 permit and all of those who had played a role in the county successfully being awarded the authority to construct the lake.

"Today we are seeing the fulfillment of the dreams of many people," Ball said

The commission chairman said he and the board "appreciate the rigorous process" of obtaining the permit because it would ensure the lake would not be a threat to the environment downstream and at the same time would be a great source for recreation as well as an economic engine for the community.

Ball also suggested the citizens be realistic and understand that the cost to construct the lake would be high.

The commission chairman said the board would be seeking both federal and state financial assistance to construct the lake, but local taxpayers would have to share in the cost.

"No matter how much aid we get from the state or federal government we will have to shoulder some of the burden," Ball said.

The commission chairman says county officials do not yet know the exact cost of constructing the lake, but he said options such as bond financing or sales tax proceeds could be used to finance the lake's construction.

Wm. Thomas Craig, the county's Tired Creek consultant and project manager, says a meeting held in Cairo four weeks ago at the request of the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proved to be a turning point for the Tired Creek lake.

"I believed it was critical for us to show congressional interest in the project at that meeting. Otherwise it could have gone down that day," Craig said.

When County Administrator Rusty Moyer asked Craig what the county needed to do the county's consultant said to ask for Congressman Bishop to attend the meeting and he did.

Craig described Bishop's presence at the meeting as "pivotal."

And after nine years of "blood, sweat and tears" Craig said he would like nothing more than the personal privilege of presenting the commissioners with the permit, but he believed that honor belonged to Congressman Bishop.

County Attorney Kevin S. Cauley served as the master of ceremonies at Tuesday's permit presentation celebration. Cauley commented on the lengthy process but noted that in the end the Corps, the EPA, the Georgia Department of Natural Resources and Environmental Protection Division are all partners in the lake project.

The county attorney said the county commission was successful in obtaining the 404 permit by securing the aid of Tommy Craig.

"Without putting our best foot forward it would have killed the project a long time ago," Cauley said. He added that it was crucial for the county to have "competent expertise" and Craig provided that.

Cauley also praised the work of Craig's associate, Laura Benz, who is an environmental attorney. He said she had been the county's main contact in recent years and probably knew

more about the ins and outs of the permit application than anyone else.

A large crowd enjoyed refreshments under a large white tent as a violinist performed. A torrential thunderstorm forced a rather quick ending to the outdoor affair with some lingering guests dashing indoors to escape the rain and lightning.

"It's been a really exciting day," Cauley said in summarizing the historic day.